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Standards of accommodation for air travel

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on standards of accommodation for air travel (A/61/188 and Corr. 1). During its consideration of the report, the Committee met with a representative of the Secretary-General who provided additional information.

2. The report of the Secretary-General on the standards of accommodation for air travel was submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 42/214 of 21 December 1987 and other subsequent resolutions and decisions. The report of the Secretary-General provides information on standards of accommodation for air travel for the two-year period ended 30 June 2006 and comparative statistics for the two-year period ended 30 June 2004.

3. The standards of air travel at the United Nations are governed by a series of General Assembly resolutions and decisions, including resolutions 42/214, 45/248 A and 53/214,[1] and decisions 40/555, 44/442, 46/450 and 57/589. Pursuant to the discretionary authority vested in the Secretary-General to authorize exceptions to air travel on a case-by-case basis and business-class travel by air in special circumstances that warrant it, the Secretary-General has promulgated administrative instructions for the purpose of implementing the various staff rules relating to the standards of accommodation for air travel and the exceptions thereto, the most recent of which is ST/AI/2006/4.

4. The Advisory Committee notes that for the 2004 to 2006 period, the number of exceptions to the standards of accommodation for air travel for the United Nations and United Nations entities totalled 217, representing an additional cost of $451,930, or an average cost of $2,082 per trip. This compares to 236 exceptions at

[1] In resolution 53/214, sect. IV, para. 14, the General Assembly decided that the President of the Assembly should have full authority to use the funds provided by the budget for the Office of the President, including travel.

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an additional cost of $442,472 for the 2002 to 2004 period, or an average cost of $1,875 per trip (see A/61/188 and Corr.1, tables 1-4). **The Committee is of the opinion that exceptions should be carefully scrutinized. To this end, the Committee recommends that the General Assembly request an audit by the Office of Internal Oversight Services of all categories of exceptions authorized within the framework of standards of accommodation for air travel.**

5. With regard to exceptions allowing first-class travel, the Advisory Committee notes from the report and from supplementary information provided to it that many of the exceptions are granted to senior United Nations staff, to staff from other United Nations entities and to visiting officials. The Committee recalls paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution 42/214, in which the Assembly authorized the Secretary-General to exercise his discretion in making exceptions to allow first-class travel on a case-by-case basis. The Committee also recalls its latest report on the matter (A/59/573, para. 10), in which it noted:

> ... the time has come for a reconsideration of the whole question of first-class travel. The Committee observes that in recent years, many airlines have significantly cut back, if not entirely eliminated, first-class sections on aircraft. Instead, several varieties of enhanced business-class travel have been developed, and it appears that differences in the level of accommodation between these classes and first class are minimal. Taking these developments into account, the General Assembly may wish to give further guidance on the future use of first-class travel with a view to its use in only the most exceptional circumstances.

6. In this context, the Advisory Committee also recalls its recent report on conditions of service and compensation for officials other than Secretariat officials (A/61/612 and Corr.1), in which it notes in paragraph 14 that first-class air travel is now restricted to a limited number of cases, and most senior officials are authorized to travel in the class immediately below first class. The Committee further notes that this change has occurred at the same time that market offers for business-class travel have increased, and even replaced, in some cases, first-class travel.

7. **The Advisory Committee believes that first-class travel should be limited to the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General. The Assembly may therefore wish to consider a revision of the policy stated in its resolution 42/214 (see also below).**

8. **Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the review of the standards of travel and entitlements for staff members, members of organs and subsidiary organs of the United Nations and organizations of the United Nations system requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 60/255 (section IV, para. 2) with a view to adopting a common policy at the United Nations system level was in preparation and would be submitted to the Assembly for consideration at the first part of its resumed sixty-first session.** In this connection, the Committee was informed that the International Civil Service Commission would not provide additional information beyond what is already available to the Assembly.